



Nonprofit Self-Assessment Checklist

Evaluate your organization against the [Standards for Excellence®: An Ethics and Accountability Code for the Nonprofit Sector](#)

The Standards for Excellence® code identifies 6 major areas of nonprofit governance and management which contain 27 different topic areas. Each topic area includes specific benchmarks and measures that provide a structured approach to building capacity, accountability, and sustainability in your organization.

Nonprofits that adhere to these benchmarks can become formally accredited by the Standards for Excellence Institute® and earn the right to display the [Seal of Excellence](#) throughout their organization. Organizations also have the option to be recognized for significant accomplishments through the Institute's *Standards Basics* and *Standards Basics Enhanced* recognition programs.

Members of the Standards for Excellence Institute and their [Replication Partners](#) can download our exclusive [Educational Resource Packets](#) for guidance when completing this checklist. The packets include information on implementing specific standards, justification for the benchmarks, best practices associated with the issue, model procedures and sample policies. Collectively they cover each of the standards in the Standards for Excellence code.

Learn more about the Standards for Excellence Institute, membership, and its signature programs at standardsforexcellence.org, or apply for the Seal of Excellence at https://webportalapp.com/sp/login/standards_for_excellence

Instructions for using this checklist:

Standards Basics Recognition requirements are in blue text.

Standards Basics Enhanced Recognition requirements are in purple text.

Accreditation requirements are in green text.

To better gauge your organization's standing:

Mark ✓ if your organization has met the standard

Mark X if your organization has not met the standard

Mark O if your organization may be meeting the standard or is partially in compliance

MAJOR AREAS

[MISSION, STRATEGY, and EVALUATION](#)
[LEADERSHIP: BOARD, STAFF, and VOLUNTEERS](#)
[LEGAL COMPLIANCE and ETHICS](#)

[FINANCE AND OPERATIONS](#)
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[PUBLIC AWARENESS, ENGAGEMENT AND ADVOCACY](#)

MISSION, STRATEGY, and EVALUATION

A. Mission and Impact

- The statement of mission is clear
- The mission is defined and approved by the board
- The organization has a vision statement
- The organization has a set of shared values
- The organization's activities are consistent with its mission, vision, and values
- The organization's activities are consistent with its mission and supported by its vision and goals

B. Planning Strategically

- The organization engages in long-term planning activities (strategic planning, financial forecasting, sustainability planning, etc.)
- The organization engages in short-term planning activities (annual planning, work plans, implementation planning, etc.)
- The organization defines specific goals and objectives and these goals clearly support the organization's mission
- The organization evaluates the success of the organization's programs and internal culture (success is measured by mission fulfillment)
- The organization's board and staff have reviewed the mission statement within the last 3 to 5 years
- The organization has identified critical strategic issues and trends in their community, and needs of people most affected by the organization's mission

C. Organizational Evaluation

- The organization defines how it measures organizational effort (in terms of financial or human capital measures)
- The organization evaluates its culture and values
- The organization has clearly stated a percentage of the organization's effort devoted to each program

D. Program Evaluation

- The organization has a framework for how each program will be evaluated that includes the following:
 - The evaluation methods are effective for the organization
 - Quantitative and qualitative data is being collected (at Basics tier, data collection must have begun)
 - The evaluation methods are respectful of diverse cultures and include input from community members
 - The evaluation methods measure the satisfaction of program participants
 - The evaluation methods measure outcomes related to efficiency and organizational effort
 - The evaluation methods measure outcomes related to effectiveness and outcomes for program participants. (These outcomes are related to the organization's mission and strategic goals)
- 40% of programs (as defined by organizational effort) are being evaluated in the manner described
- 100% of programs are being evaluated in the manner described
- The evaluation methods encourage candid input from board, staff, and program participants
- Information gained through program evaluations is shared across the organization to board, staff, and participants as applicable to adjust, expand, or eliminate programs.
- Evaluation efforts consider power dynamics within the nonprofit and the community

E. Strategic Partnerships

- The organization partners with other organizations to help meet its mission
- The organization has a written procedure for determining who to partner with on what programs or issues and process for annual review of partnerships
- The organization examines potential partners prior to the start of the partnership

- Where the partnership would require it, the organization has in place a contract, MOU, or similar documentation
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LEADERSHIP: BOARD, STAFF, and VOLUNTEERS

A. Leadership and Governance

(1) Governance and Fiduciary Responsibility

- The responsibility for recording board minutes is designated to a specific person
- Board minutes demonstrate that the board understands its duties of care, loyalty, and obedience
- Accurate and clear minutes reflecting board and committee actions are kept
- Board and committee minutes are distributed to all board members
- Committees who have been given decision-making authority report any committee actions to the full board
- When presented to the board, committee actions are reflected in the board minutes
- The full board meets at least four times a year
- Board agendas are strategically structured around decision-making
- Board meetings are efficient, effective, and engaging
- Board and committee minutes are stored in a secure location and are backed up as needed
- Benchmarks related to board composition found below under section 2A5 (Board Member Independence)
- The board has established bylaws and other organizational governing documents
- The board reviews the bylaws and policies every 3 to 5 years. (demonstrated by the minutes, board agendas, board calendar, etc.)

(2) Executive Supervision, Performance, and Compensation

- The Board chooses the organization's Executive.
- The board has reviewed and approved the Executive's compensation within the last year
- The board has reviewed the Executive's performance within the last year
- The board helps the Executive plan for improvement on areas of growth identified in the evaluation
- The board has granted the Executive authority to enforce management policies
- The Executive has a board approved job description or contract
- The board works in partnership with the Executive to accomplish the organization's goals

(3) Board Effectiveness

- The board takes responsibility for the operations of the board (demonstrated across the other benchmarks)
- The board has evaluated its performance at least once in the past two years
- The board plans for improvement on areas of growth identified in the evaluation
- Board members have a written job description or expectations
- Board members regularly attend meetings
- Board members participate in board and organization activities as outlined in written board expectations (including attending meeting, raising money, serving on committees)
- Board members participate in board committees if required
- All committees have a stated purpose
- The board has a strategy for recruiting and selecting new board members
- The board recruitment strategies address how the board will ensure that board members have an appropriate mix of talent, connections to the community, and diversity inclusive of the community served
- The organization's bylaws outline a limit on the number of consecutive terms a board member may serve
- The board orients new board members
- New member board orientation includes expectations and responsibilities, an introduction to the Standards for Excellence code and any other code of ethics, values, etc.
- The board provides educational opportunities and leadership development for board members
- When necessary, the board takes action to remove board members who do not comply with board policies

(4) Succession Planning and Leadership Development

- The board plays a role in planning for the succession and transition of the Executive and has a board approved succession plan
- The board has plan for board leadership succession and board member transitions
- The board has planned for the succession and transition of the Executive
- If a new Executive has been appointed or hired in the last five years, the board followed its succession plan
- All employees and volunteers have a position description which outlines their work and responsibilities
- The Executive has planned for the transition of key staff and volunteer leaders

(5) Board Member Independence

- Board members do not receive compensation, except allowable reimbursement of expenses (such as transportation or childcare). When necessary to foster inclusivity, modest financial support may be provided to a board member to allow them to fully participate in board activities.
- There are at least five independent and unrelated directors who care deeply about the mission, who are from the community, and who understand their fiduciary duties.
- If employees have a vote on the board, they are not in a position to exercise undue influence

(6) Board Meetings

These topics are addressed above in Section 2A1 Governance and Fiduciary Responsibility

B. Leadership and Operational Management

(1) Functions of the Executive

The Executive has established management policies as needed to provide for the proper functioning of the organization

(2) Supporting the Board

- The Executive provides accurate and timely program and financial information and resources to the board
- The organization has a procedure for setting and reviewing compensation for its employees
- This plan is fair and considers comparative elements (including highest and lowest paid employees, comparison within the industry, and the economy) and the plan ensures that race, gender or other protected classes do not affect compensation
- The board has reviewed the organization's compensation structure
- The organization has articulated what contributions volunteers make to the organization
- The organization utilizes this volunteer information in evaluations of organizational effort and program efficiency or in grant writing or reporting

(3) Organizational and Financial Sustainability

- The organization has a sustainability plan or has considered organization sustainability in the organization's other planning activities (program, strategic, financial)

(4) Managing Employees and Volunteers

(Note: these are required for staff at Basics tier and for volunteers at Basics Enhanced).

- All staff and volunteers receive an orientation to their position and to the organization
- This orientation includes an introduction to the Standards for excellence and any other code of ethics or values statements
- The Executive ensures that all employees and volunteers are regularly evaluated.
- The organization's employee policies cover all legally required elements
- All employees receive a written evaluation at least annually.
- The employee and volunteer policies outline the following requirements:
 - Recruitment and hiring
 - Screening of potential employees and volunteers (if applicable, background checks should be employed for employees and volunteers working with children and youth)
 - Orientation and position-specific training
 - Supervision and regular evaluation
 - Recognition (for volunteers)

- Working conditions
- Telecommuting (if applicable)
- Employee benefits including vacation and sick leave, insurance, etc. (applicable only to paid employees)
- Grievance procedures
- Whistleblower policy
- Confidentiality of employee, client and organization records and information
- Employee and volunteer professional development
- Policies address equity, fairness and safety for volunteers and staff.

C. Justice, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

- The organization has a clear picture of the community they serve including cultures, backgrounds, and abilities.
 - The organization effectively and intentionally creates a culture that demonstrates practices of diversity, equity and inclusion for program participants, board, staff and volunteers
 - The organization has an assessment tool to assess the organization's diversity, equity and inclusion in terms of policy, environment, programs, staff and board. The tool includes input from community members
 - The organization has a board approved justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion plan for the organization based on their assessments
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LEGAL COMPLIANCE and ETHICS

A. Ethics

- The organization's leadership has adopted a clear set of ethical principles, such as a code of ethics, code of conduct, or values statement
- The organization's code of ethics, code of conduct, or values statement is readily available to all stakeholders (board, staff, volunteers, program participants, donors, the public)
- Those representing the organization conduct themselves professionally and respectfully
- The organization has a grievance procedure in place that addresses problem solving and actions for addressing and resolving complaints effectively
- The organization effectively handles complaints by program participants, employees, board members, volunteers, or other stakeholders
- There are policies and procedures in place that protect the confidentiality and privacy of program participant's personal information

B. Maintaining Legal Compliance

- The organization's 990 is filed on a timely basis and contains accurate information about the organization's operations (including UBIT, valuing in-kind gifts, lobbying, governance and management, related entities and related transactions)
- The organization is registered as required with all applicable federal, state, and local authorities
- As appropriate, the organization holds all licenses it needs to perform its programs and services
- The organization has a policy outlining document destruction and retention (includes a policy and a schedule)
- The organization knows about and follows federal, state, and local laws
- The organization conducts an internal legal compliance review at least every 2 to 3 years
- The board of directors is aware of the results of the regular internal compliance review

C. Required Public Disclosures

- The organization complies with all federal and state disclosure laws

- The organization has designated a representative who is responsible for ensuring that the organization is complying with federal and state disclosure laws
- The organization makes its Form 1023, form 990, and IRS determination letter available upon request

D. Reporting Misconduct and Whistleblower Protection

- The organization has a whistleblower policy in place that allows employees, board members, volunteers to report wrongdoing without risk of retaliation for reporting.
- The organization's board, staff, and volunteers are all made aware of the whistleblower policy

E. Conflicts of Interest

- The organization has a conflict of interest policy.
- The policy identifies the types of conduct or transactions that raise conflict of interest concerns
- The policy provides for review of individual transactions by the uninvolved members of the board of directors
- The conflict of interest disclosure statement provides a space for the board member, employee or volunteer to disclose any known interests that the individual, or a member of the individual's immediate family, has in any business entity which transacts business with the organization
- The disclosure statement is signed upon appointment or hire and annually thereafter by all board, staff, and volunteers with significant independent decision-making authority

FINANCE AND OPERATIONS

A. Financial Budgeting, Reporting and Monitoring

- The board approves the organization's budget each year. If applicable, the capital budget is also approved
- The organization's budget reflects the organization's mission, vision, values, goals and objectives
- Regular internal financial statements are prepared by staff
- The board reviews (at least quarterly) internal financial statements which identify and explain any material variation between actual and budgeted revenues and expenses
- The board reviews the budget to ensure there is enough income to pay its expenses
- The board reviews how much of the organization's resources are spent on program, administration and fundraising.
- If required (organizations with annual income greater than \$500,000), an audit is conducted by a CPA hired by the board
- The full board reviews and accepts the audited financial statements
- The board receives a copy of the management letter along with management's response
- The board monitors implementation of the recommendations in the management letter

B. Financial Policies

- The organization has board-approved policies that address:
 - Internal controls
 - Investment of the organization's assets
 - Purchasing practices
 - Unrestricted current net assets (reserves)

C. Administrative Policies

- Nonprofits have administrative policies in place that are needed based upon work mission and values.
- The organization has board-approved policies that address:

Crisis and disaster planning, including crisis communications.

- Information technology, including but not limited to data security, data storage, and technology use.
- Communication and social media

D. Risk Management and Insurance

- The organization regularly assesses risks that organization and its operation may face
 - The organization carries liability insurance or can provide full board decision to opt-out
 - The organization carries directors' and officers' insurance or can provide full board decision to opt-out
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RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

A. Resource Development Plan

- The organization has a board-approved resource development plan in place that outlines a framework for ensuring the organization's financial resources
- The plan is regularly reviewed for alignment with the organization's budget
- The plan includes diversified sources of income that align with the organization's values and abilities.
- A process is in place for evaluating the cost-effectiveness of all resource development activities
- The organization's fundraising ratio is less than 3:1 (it costs \$1 or less to raise \$3 or more). Smaller, younger organization may need additional time to meet this ratio.

B. Sources of Income

- The organization evaluates its sources of income for:
 - impact on the community and the organization,
 - overall mission alignment, feasibility, and
 - associated risks

C. Fundraising Activities

- Solicitation and promotional materials are accurate and truthful and correctly identify the organization, its mission, and the intended use of the solicited funds
- The organization includes all state required disclosures on fundraising, solicitations, and receipts
- All statements made by the nonprofit in its fundraising appeals about the use of a contribution are honored
- Solicitations are free from undue influence or excessive pressure
- Solicitations are respectful of the needs and interests of the community the organizations serves, donors or potential donors

D. Donor Relationships and Privacy

- The organization keeps needs of communities central to fundraising efforts
- The organization avoids situations where donors have undue influence over the organization.
- The organization's board approved fundraising policies address:
 - The donor's right to determine how their personal information is used
 - The donor's right to remain anonymous
 - The donor's right to request that the organization curtail repeated mailings or telephone solicitations from in-house lists
 - The donor's right to have their name removed from any mailing lists, particularly those which are sold, rented, or exchanged
- The organization honors the known intentions of a donor regarding the use of donated funds

E. Acceptance of Gifts

- The organization's board approved fundraising polices address:

- The acceptance and disposition of charitable or in-kind gifts that are received in the course of its regular fundraising activities
- Procedures to determine any limits on individuals or entities from which the organization will accept a gift
- The type of property which will be accepted
- Whether to accept an unusual or unanticipated gift in light of the organization’s mission and organizational capacity

F. Fundraising On Behalf of the Organization

- Staff, board members, volunteers, consultants, contractors, or other organizations or businesses fundraising on behalf of the organization are provided appropriate direction and oversight
 - All paid professional fundraising consultants are properly registered with the appropriate state authorities
 - Internal and external resource development personnel are not compensated based on a percentage of the amount raised or other commission formula
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PUBLIC AWARENESS, ENGAGEMENT AND ADVOCACY

A. Educating and Engaging the Public

- The organization seeks input and advice from community members
- The organization has a procedure in place for verifying the accuracy and sufficiency of information that is distributed to the public.
- The organization ensures that materials are provided in a way that is accessible to the community considering reading levels, language access, and different abilities
- The organization makes readily available at its website the following annual report information:
 - Mission
 - Contact information
 - Program activities
 - Board members
 - Key management staff
 - Summary Statement of Financial Position
 - Summary Statement of Financial Activities
- The organization's contact information and key staff members are easily accessible to the public

B. Advancing the Mission Through Public Policy and Advocacy

- The organization has a board-approved advocacy policy which outlines the process for determining positions on specific issues relevant to their missions and values.
- The organization can articulate its advocacy goals and activities
- The organization is aware of critical policy issues that have the potential to impact their community
- The organization has developed partnerships around critical policy issues

C. Engaging in Lobbying and Political Activity

- All of the 501c3 organization's activities are non-partisan
- The organization transparently reports its lobbying activities
- If required, all internal or external lobbyists are registered with the appropriate federal, state, or local authorities

Ready to begin your path to excellence?

Contact the Standards for Excellence Institute or one of our Replication Partners today to get started.



Standards for Excellence Institute

1500 Union Avenue, 2500
Baltimore, MD 21211
410-727-1726

standardsforexcellence.org

Maryland Nonprofits

1500 Union Avenue, 2500
Baltimore, MD 21211
410-727-6367

marylandnonprofits.org



Alabama Association of Nonprofits

P.O. Box 292932
Birmingham, Alabama 35229
205-879-4712

alabamanonprofits.org



The American Nurses Association

8515 Georgia Avenue Suite 400
Silver Spring, MD 20910
800-274-4ANA

nursingworld.org



The Arc of the United States

1825 K Street NW, Suite 1200,
Washington, D.C. 20006
800-433-5255

thearc.org



Center for Nonprofit Advancement

1666 K Street NW
Suite 440
Washington, DC 20006
202-457-0549

nonprofitadvancement.org



Center for Public Justice Sacred Sector Program

Washington, DC 20002
202-695-2667

cpjustice.org



Delaware Alliance for Nonprofit Advancement

100 W. 10th Street, Suite 1012
Wilmington DE, 19801
302-777-5500

delawarenonprofit.org



Leadership Roundtable

415 Michigan Ave NE, 275
Washington, DC 20017
202-223-8962

leadershiproundtable.org



Nonprofit Support Group

716-855-5822
Thensg.org



Ohio Association of Nonprofit Organizations

57 Jefferson Avenue Suite 206
Columbus, OH 43215
888-480-6266

oano.org



Oklahoma Center for Nonprofits

720 W. Wilshire Blvd, 115
Oklahoma City, OK 73116
405-463-6886

oklahomacenterfornonprofits.org



Pennsylvania Association of Nonprofit Organizations

4801 Lindle Road
Harrisburg, PA 17111
717-236-8584

pano.org



Nonprofit Impact Institute A Project of Social Venture

Partners Dallas
214-855-5520
Svpdallas.org



Tennessee Nonprofit Network

630 South Cooper Street
Memphis, TN 38104
901-726-5725

ttnonprofitss.org

TENNESSEE NONPROFIT NETWORK

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